

# Center for Youth Leadership

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Why wait for someone else to make a difference?

## **Connecticut Legislature Select Committee on Children *Testimony in Support of Raised SB 193: An Act Concerning Mandated Reporters and Requiring Criminal History Records Checks for Youth Camp Employees and Volunteers***

***February 28, 2012***

*Emily Todd and Millie Cunningham*

Hi Senator Gerratana and Representative Urban. We have a special greeting for Representative Wood, who is from our district in Norwalk.

My name is Emily Todd and this is Millie Cunningham. On behalf of the 226 members of the Center for Youth Leadership at Brien McMahon High School, we are here in support of *Raised SB193 - An Act Concerning Mandated Reporters and Requiring Criminal History Records Checks for Youth Camp Employees and Volunteers*.

Let me tell you what we've been up to since we spoke before this committee in January:

- ◆ We wrote a couple of op-ed essays about child safety at camps, which we are happy to say were published in four Connecticut newspapers with a combined Sunday circulation of 199,000.
- ◆ Our members continue to call camps posing as parents who are interested in enrolling their children. Of the 37 camps in Fairfield County we have contacted since the beginning of February, 34 do not conduct background checks or lead workshops on how to recognize and report child abuse.
- ◆ And our members continue to greet the parents of elementary and middle school age children in school parking lots and at recreation sites in Fairfield County to urge them to ask camp directors about background checks and child abuse workshops *before* they enroll their children in camp.

Generally speaking, we are pleased with the language in SB193. However, we do have several suggestions, primarily for clarification sake:

1. When you reference “any youth camp administrator, director or their alternate” in Section 1, Subsection B, you may want to add *“who is 18 years of age and older.”*
2. You may want to insert language that defines “volunteer” as someone who “...provides an on-going service at the camp, not necessarily under the supervision of a staff member who has passed a background check,” as opposed to someone who will lead one workshop on a given day to a select group of campers.
3. The phrase “conducted by the camp” and the timing of the background checks are important because a handful of camps we researched accept background checks conducted by an employer or volunteer group. For example, a prospective employee or volunteer will say to a camp director, “I was hired by company X just last year. Will you accept the results of that check?”

Therefore, we suggest you re-write section 2(a) so it reads “...shall require a prospective employee or volunteer to submit to a state and national criminal history records check *that is conducted by the camp* prior to the individual (1) beginning employment at the camp and (2) beginning volunteer service at the camp, *and that he/she shall not start working/volunteering at the camp until the criminal history records check has been returned to the camp and camp administrators are satisfied with the results, per camp policy and state statutes.*”

The same holds true for item 5 in section 3 of SB193. It should read, “*prior to an individual starting employment or volunteer service, a criminal history records shall be conducted by the camp for such individual in accordance with section 2 of this act, with the results of the check accepted by camp administrators.*”

4. You will need to come up with language about individuals whose professional employment outside the camp requires a criminal background check. We’re

thinking here of teachers, police officers, firemen and others. For example, many of the camps we researched told us, "We don't do background checks on a teacher or other school employees because their school district conducts checks on them." As we all know, many professions do not conduct on-going reviews of employees' and/or volunteers' backgrounds.

We know this all sounds incredibly cynical, but it's a sign of the times. The vast majority of adults who work with children do so because they care about their well-being; they would never do anything to harm them. They do not hesitate to complete a background check, and are willing to wait on their hire until the background check has been completed and the results accepted by camp administrators.

Camps also want to do right by children. But the camping industry needs some oversight where several items are concerned, as outlined in Raised SB 193 and our comments. Nevertheless, we will not be surprised if there is some push back on the background checks requirement, even though many people consider it - and the child abuse prevention workshop - a no brainer.

Thanks for the opportunity to talk to you.

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